

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 0155

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, RH, VT, SF

SUBJECT: VATICAN'S WATCHFUL ATTITUDE TOWARD SOUTHERN AFRICA

REF: LUSAKA 2506 (NOTAL)

1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, NOTABLY RODESIA, PROVIDED OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO DISCUSS VATICAN VIEWS ON AREA WITH RESPONSIBLE OFFICER IN VATICAN FOREIGN OFFICE AND TO INQUIRE WHETHER VATICAN IS PROVIDING GUIDANCE TO LOCAL CHURCHES DURING THIS LIKELY-TO-BE-DIFFICULT TRANSITIONAL PERIOD. SOURCE SAID THAT WITH EXCEPTION OF PORTUGUESE TERRITORIES WHERE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT ALREADY UNDER WAY, VATICAN HAS SCRUPULOUSLY REFRAINED FROM TRYING TO INFLUENCE JUDGEMENT OF LOCAL CHURCHMEN. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT SHOULD SITUATION IN ANY OF PRESENT WHITE GOVERNED AREAS TAKE DRAMATIC TURN FOR WORSE, VATICAN WOULD LIKELY TAKE STEP TO ENCOURAGE BISHOPS TO COUNSEL MODERATION.

2. SOURCE POINTED OUT THAT SOUTH AFRICAN BISHOPS THEMSELVES HAVE GENERALLY BEEN CAUTIOUS IN APPROACHING LOCAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE LEFT NO MISUNDERSTANDING THAT THEY STRONGLY OPPOSE APARTHEID POLICIES. SOUTH AFRICAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE WILL MEET IN THREE WEEKS AND IT IS POSSIBLE THEY WILL ADOPT MORE CRITICAL STANCE TOWARD GOVERNMENT. MOST VOCAL CHURCHMEN IN
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AREA ARE ARCHBISHOP HURLEY OF DURBAN AND BISHOP LAMONT OF UMTALI,

SOURCE OBSERVED, AND THEY NEED NO PRODDING FROM ROME TO CONTINUE THEIR SHARP AND POIGNANT CRITICISMS OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES.

3. COMMENT: THERE LITTLE DOUBT THAT VATICAN VERY PLEASED WITH POSITIONS TAKEN BY BISHOPS HURLEY AND LAMONT AND, IN KEEPING WITH NORMAL VATICAN PRACTICE, APOSTOLIC DELEGATE POLEDRINI CAN BE EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN LOW PROFILE UNLESS HIERARCHY BEHAVES IN MANNER DISPLEASING TO VATICAN. DESPITE THIS SEEMINGLY DISPASSIONATE VATICAN APPROACH TO PROBLEM, THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE SUGGESTING THAT HIGHEST VATICAN CIRCLES ARE DEEPLY PREOCCUPIED OVER POSSIBILITY OF SERIOUS DETERIORATION OF SITUATION FOR CHRISTIANITY THROUGHOUT AFRICA, INCLUDING SOUTHERN AREAS. VATICAN SENIOR OFFICIAL RECENTLY COMMENTED TO US THAT AFRICA WHICH HAD IN RECENT YEARS BEEN CONSIDERED THE MOST FERTILE AREA FOR CHRISTIAN EVANGELIZATION, NOW EXPERIENCING SERIOUS POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPHEAVALS WHICH IN SOME PLACCS, NOTABLY CHAD AND ZAIRE, DISPLAYED A NEGATIVE TENDENCY ON THE PART OF THE LEADERSHIP TO REESTABLISH PAGAN PRACTICES AND VALUES AT EXPENSE OF CHRISTIANITY. VOLPE

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